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ABSTRACT

This information analysis paper distinguishes between issues and policy in vocational education, identifies current issues and outlines official policies, and makes recommendations for coordination among leaders who develop issues and policies in vocational education. Its synthesis of recent studies of vocational education supports the notion of an extension of vocational education's goals, target populations, and cooperating agencies. Areas of emphasis identified for vocational education policy include the need for increased job satisfaction, opportunities for retraining, flexible programming to meet individual needs, accountability through evaluation, responsiveness to labor market supply and demand, coordination among various agencies and institutions, elimination of sex bias, and availability of vocational education to minorities and the disadvantaged. The author concludes by recommending the application of research to policy decisions and by raising questions for policy makers to consider. (TA)

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Information Series No. 121

ISSUES AND POLICY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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FOREWORD

The Educational Resources Information Center on Career Education (ERIC/CE) is one of sixteen clearinghouses in a nationwide information system that is funded by the National Institute of Education. The scope of work for ERIC/CE includes the fields of adult-continuing, career, and vocational-technical education. One of the functions of the Clearinghouse is to interpret the literature that is related to each of these fields. This paper should be of particular interest to individuals and groups involved in policy making in vocational education.

The profession is indebted to Carol P. Kowle for her scholarship in the preparation of this paper on policy development in vocational education. Marla Peterson, Specialist at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Career Education, supervised the publication's development. Madelon Plaisted and Jo-Ann Cherry coordinated the production of the paper for final publication.

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ISSUES AND POLICY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

BACKGROUND

Any attempt at defining issues in vocational education is complicated by the fact that despite the legislation of 1963, 1968, and 1976 the field is more characterized by diversity than consistency of opinion. The leadership in vocational education is yet to put forth a unified philosophical stance. Even the legislation represents what David (1977) describes as "a constellation of public policies" (p. 10).

The absence of a clearly defined philosophical stance is due in part to broad social, political, and economic forces affecting vocational education's growth and direction. The rapid expansion of technology, high unemployment, and disillusionment with education, and increasing social concern for the plight of the disadvantaged have all shaped the issues and resultant policies in vocational education. No one point of view could adequately encompass all the factors contributing to the legislative and issue orientation of vocational education.

Such diversity of viewpoints on philosophy, issues, and policy in vocational education is also related to the number of agencies and interest groups having input into the policy-making process. The U.S. Office of Education, the state Research Coordinating Units, state boards of vocational education, the national and state advisory councils on vocational education, professional organizations, university-based and private research centers, legislators, lobbyists, and local boards of education are all involved in some aspect of policy making. The number of groups contributing to policy development and the expansion of all phases of vocational education itself underscore the diffused and decentralized nature of the entire system.

Too much uniformity of thinking on issues and policies in vocational education is both unworkable and generally undesirable. This is especially true in light of a developing trend toward "a larger pluralism in the structure of education--work or vocational education

policy" (Wirtz, 1976, p. 7). Nevertheless, significant interest groups within the vocational education structure, such as the American Vocational Association and the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education, have decried the lack of coordination in planning and the lack of a framework for policy development. This criticism from the field and changes reflected in the 1976 legislation portend a new era of better coordination and communication among various constituencies within vocational education. Especially important is a better exchange of information between researchers who supply the data behind the policy and those who make the policy decisions in vocational education.

The purpose of this paper is to distinguish between issues and policy in vocational education, to identify current issues and outline official policies, and to make recommendations for coordination among leaders who develop issues and policies in vocational education.

PHILOSOPHY, ISSUES, POLICY: SOME DISTINCTIONS

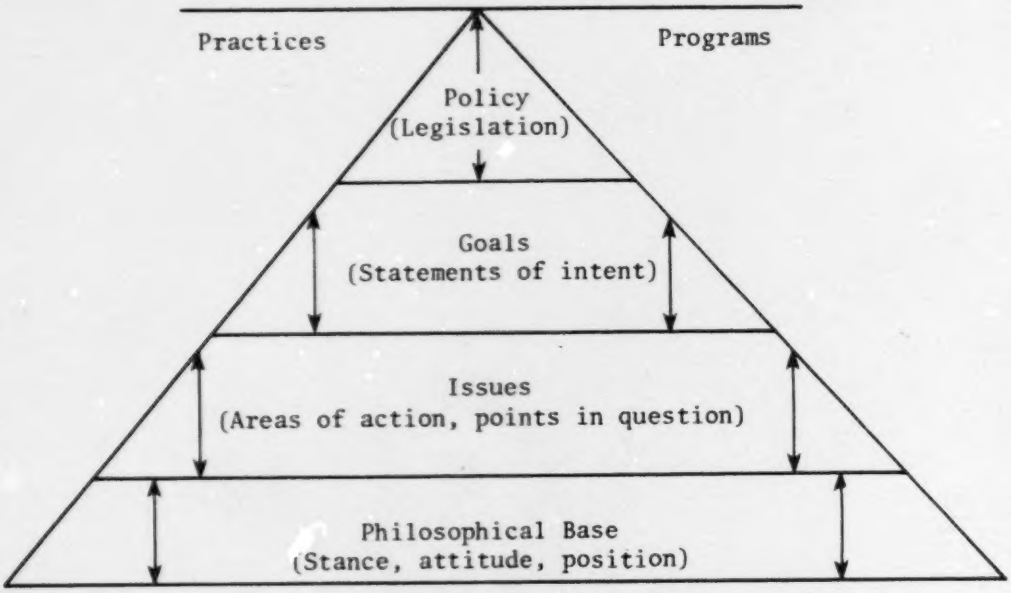
In its broadest sense, a philosophy of education implies a stance, attitude, or orientation toward a concept or group of concepts. For example, a pluralistic philosophy of vocational education is implicit in this statement from *Policy-Making for Vocational Education* (DHEW/OE, 1975): "Vocational education is for those individuals who need it, want it, and are able to profit by it" (p. 5). In relation to philosophy, issues exist on a slightly lower level of abstraction. Issues may be defined as areas of action or points in question, as for example, the need for provision of vocational education to the handicapped and disadvantaged. Goals are issues which have been refined to the point of specific intent to accomplish an activity. In this case, an appropriate goal might be the elimination of barriers to the handicapped and disadvantaged in vocational programs. Goals or statements of intent may become policy; the most definitive expression of policy is legislation. Policy, then, involves "governing principles, plans or courses of action. At federal and state levels, educational policy is in the form of legislation codified in rules and regulations and administered by governmental agencies" (Magisos, 1976, p. 12).

While policies are more specific than issues or ideas, they "are shaped by sets of ideas that have emerged historically in the pursuit of particular objectives and intentions which appear to hang together in some logical sense, and have at least the air of being coherent and mutually consistent" (David, 1977, p. 12). At the same time, "policy behavior is a conscious effort to shape a future. It remains future-oriented when it is retrospective in the sources of its ideas, and even when its aim is to achieve a return to some idealized past

state or condition" (p.14). Policies state principles, they deal with the realm of action, not theory. According to Goldsmith (1976), "Policy statements must be expressed in positive terms. The word *should* in a policy statement says, 'I hope ... I hope.' The word *shall* is positive and demands action" (p. 19).

Policy represents the final step in the development of philosophy, issues, and goals. This relationship might be schematized as follows:

Relationship between Philosophy, Issues, Goals and Policy in Vocational Education



Legislation spells out implicit policy on the federal role vis à vis Vocational Education i.e., those guidelines, programs, and practices specified in federal rules and regulations. Yet, even the legislation does not represent the codification of a *recognized* philosophy, set of issues, or goals; rather, as indicated, it constitutes a "constellation of public policies." Since no consistent policy exists for education generally, it is hardly possible for vocational education policy to be more unified. Conant (1964) comments that a national policy on education is not likely because of the nature of the Constitution and its system of checks and balances. The federal government exercises its control over educational policy by exerting the "power of the purse" over the states. The government "tempts"

states into activities by offering to cover part of the expenses or withholds funds if states do not comply with mandates (p. 118). This state of affairs makes policy compliance often merely reactive, and policy formation largely haphazard.

The rapid growth of vocational education and lack of communication between policy-making forces often result in chaos. In the areas where policy has not been established by legislation or where, at the very least, philosophy and issues still require statement, vocational education is threatened with confusion. Manpower legislation, services to the handicapped, and vocational research efforts, in particular, are marked by poor organization and duplication of effort. In turn, this has given rise to criticism from the field. David explains the problem:

> Vocational education was once comprehensible as a dimension of educational policy. It no longer is that. Moreover, vocational education policy is probably less definable in purpose solely in terms of its economic function that it ever has been. (p. 17)

This point of view is reiterated in the National Advisory Council on Vocational Education's recent call for the establishment of a national vocational education policy. The Council's report (1975) states in part:

> The growth of vocational education has been very rapid, but unfortunately without any relationship to national goals. Its growth has been growth largely without design--growth outside any framework of policy. The growth of vocational education has been guided by very general imperatives--to provide more work-relevant education to more students.
>
> As a result, while the nation has now a vast and growing complex of programs in vocational education, there is not a *national policy* for vocational education. Vocational education has clearly outgrown its original rationale. (p.7)

A clear distinction is implied here between federal legislative policy toward Vocational Education and general policy which represents the philosophy of vocational educators in the field.

A comprehensive policy might be a practical impossibility, but the need for communication among those contributing to policy has been a recurring problem. Bushnell (1975) characterizes this problem prior to the 1976 legislation:

> Policy-makers from all walks of life--federal legislators and executives, state and local politicians and educators, employers, parents, and even workers--are embroiled in a running debate over how and who vocational education should serve. Supporters and critics alike agree on the need for a national debate which strives to clarify not only the goals but the ideology undergirding the structure and role of vocational education in America. (p. 4)

Certainly, some of that need for discussion has been answered by the debate surrounding the passage of the 1976 amendments. Still, there is a notable lack of communication among vocational educators. A first consideration before any agreement can be reached, no matter how broadly-defined, is a mutual understanding of the central issues.

ISSUES IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Expansion of thinking in vocational education to accommodate the greater scope of the concept as it is now defined constitutes a major issue in itself. Parnes (1976) states this point of view in commenting that "vocational education should not be conceived as a curriculum, but as a broad objective that should permeate the entire educational experience" (p. 5). Wirtz (1976) adds that "a larger pluralism in the structure of education-work or vocational education policy seems to me the key to developing and using the limitless human resource ... upon which the future depends" (p. 7). David (1977) sums up the "global question" involved in vocational education policy making as follows:

> What kinds of investments of public resources should be made in what manner by federal, state, and local governments in students enrolled in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary educational institutions, that will contribute most to their development as individuals, to their roles as workers, to enriching the quality of their personal lives, to meeting future demands for labor, to a productive and healthy economy, and to realizing the values of a free and democratic society? (p. 13)

A synthesis of recent studies of vocational education supports the notion of an extension of vocational education's goals, target

populations, and cooperating agencies. Copa (1976) analyzes four major documents which affected the policy position of Congress when drafting the new vocational education legislation. The documents, *Work in America* (DHEW, 1972), The National Planning Association Studies, and *A Decade of Manpower Development and Training* (Mangum and Walsh, 1973) express the following themes:

- Vocational education operates mainly on the supply side of the labor market and has little control over the demand for its products. Concern over worker satisfaction can be answered on the demand side of the market by other agencies through *job creation* and *job redesign*. Cooperation with other agencies is needed to reach this objective.

- *Adult vocational education* is the area greatest in need of assessment and expansion in coordination with job redesign and job creation. This should be done while mindful of the priority involving preparation of those initially entering occupations.

- Vocational education should rethink its *purpose*. Is it simply education for work? How does it relate to career education? Should it move to take care of populations now served by manpower legislation?

- There is an increasing emphasis on the *satisfaction* received from work. This may mean greater attention to counseling and guidance and to the preparation of workers who can effect their own job redesign.

- There is a need for *local labor market information systems*. These should provide job descriptions, union regulations, educational requirements, and information on supply and demand of workers.

- If vocational education is to provide information for accountability, its *evaluation* techniques should be improved.

- Vocational educators must be alert to reports written by those lacking thorough knowledge of vocational education, but who, nonetheless, are in a position to make policy recommendations. At the same time, vocational educators can profit from outside review (pp. 176-177, *Italics Mine*).

The National Advisory Council on Vocational Education has issued two recent statements emphasizing the need for a broader purpose and more comprehensive planning in vocational education. *A Call for a National Policy on Vocational Education* (December 15, 1975) advocates a strong national policy and accents the importance of vocational education

in manpower training and the national economic picture. *The Challenge to Vocational Education in the Economic Crisis: Policy Statement* (January 16, 1975) urges vocational educators to take action on ten points. These points reiterate the themes expressed in Copa's summary of policy issues while incorporating the following additional concerns:

- Training or retraining of the unemployed.
- Training for emerging occupations and phasing out of obsolete programs.
- Greater program flexibility for adult, retraining and outreach requirements.
- Strengthening of home economics education in the fight against inflation.
- Survey of job opportunities in agri-business related to the nation's food needs (p. 2).

Vocational educators from five states have formulated some additional statements concerning policy on program planning, personnel development, fiscal matters, and evaluation (DHEW/OE, 1975). The statements echo those of Copa, the National Advisory Council, and others. Once again, these emphasize the need for increased job satisfaction, opportunities for retraining, flexible programming to meet individual needs, accountability through evaluation, responsiveness to labor market supply and demand, coordination among various agencies and institutions, elimination of sex bias, and availability of vocational education to minorities and the disadvantaged. A democratic philosophy is stressed in the statement that vocational education is for all who want, need, or can profit from it (p. 5). Thus, issues leading to policy in vocational education involve administrators, educators, and legislators at every level. They deal with youthful and adult learners throughout the vocational education program. They relate both to individual needs and social and labor market demands. They concern the provision of educational opportunity to all who need and want it. These issues have been expressed in most concrete terms in the form of vocational education legislation.

RELATION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION LEGISLATION TO POLICY

Legislation in vocational education reflects the themes outlined above. Beginning with the Vocational Education Act of 1963 (P.L. 88-210),

vocational education has become increasingly comprehensive in purpose and scope. The 1963 Act, for example, established these issues as concerns of legislative policy: ready access to vocational education for the disadvantaged and handicapped, establishment of a National Advisory Council to consider future policy issues, and provision of funding to post-secondary education, work-study programs, residential schools, and categorical aids to specific groups. Job retraining and the provision of ancillary services are other concerns identified in this act. University-based research centers, the ERIC vocational education clearinghouse, and RCU's were funded under this act during the decade of the 1960s.

Under the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968 (P.L. 90-576), as Bushnell (p. 24) comments, the policy of greater access to vocational programs employed in the 1963 legislation was reemphasized and extended. The disadvantaged and handicapped were particularly singled out as targets for funding under this legislation. Ancillary services, particularly vocational guidance and career planning, also received more attention. The definition of vocational education itself was expanded to include all but professional occupations. The amendments made the National Advisory Council an established body with corresponding state councils. Research was funded under a program purchase policy, with three authorized subsections: Part C (research and training in vocational education), Part D (exemplary projects and programs), and Part I (curriculum development).

The policy trends indicated by both the 1963 Act and 1968 Amendments include:

1. Expansion of the concept of vocational education.

2. Greater recognition of the needs of the handicapped and disadvantaged as part of this expansion.

3. Establishment of the role of the advisory council as an official body with input into the policy-making process.

4. Increasing emphasis on the role of research not so much as a policy-making process, but as a designated activity conducted under contract with federal or state governments.

Many of these trends are continued in the Education Amendments of 1976 (P.L. 94-482), but new policy concerns have arisen as a result of social forces affecting the 1970s. Once more, expansion is the keynote. Vocational education for the disadvantaged is an important policy here as well, although elimination of sex bias, bilingual education, and training of those in correctional institutions are important emerging

issues. A National Vocational Education Data System is established for the first time to coordinate the masses of information on rising student numbers, programs, staff, and expenditures. Personnel development programs are expanded. Local advisory committees are also mandated. Research and research-related activities are directed toward program improvement and made more accountable in terms of impact.

The emphasis on the needs of individuals and particularly the needs of disadvantaged groups is reflected in developments from the 1963 to the 1976 vocational education legislation. Wirtz's call for a "larger pluralism" is becoming increasingly important in vocational education. For example, vocational education tailored specifically to urban and rural community needs has become a recent priority. With the creation of local advisory councils, more community involvement in the establishment of vocational education policy is a strong possibility for the future. As there is more grass-roots input into policy, it is more likely that community and minority group concerns will be incorporated into future statements.

On the level of such specific policies as elimination of sex bias and provision of training to minority groups, the issues themselves may recede as problems are solved and vocational education extends its areas of concern to encompass needs. Broader issues such as job satisfaction, adult vocational education, job creation, retraining and redesign, and program evaluation are likely to remain for years to come.

RECOMMENDATIONS: APPLICATION OF RESEARCH TO POLICY DECISIONS

David's formulation of the "global question" behind vocational education policy illustrates the difficulty of compressing all of vocational education's concerns into a comprehensive policy statement, especially in light of continued expansion of programs. Widespread dissatisfaction with the lack of a philosophical base for vocational education policy necessitates better coordination and communication among those involved. Better communication can be effected in part through the network of national, state, and local advisory councils, through the National Center for Research on Vocational Education, and through the state Research Coordinating Units. Better coordination of the policy thinking threatens to be a more difficult task to accomplish, but the newly mandated national data system for vocational education and results from national center studies can help supply the factual groundwork for informed policy making.

Ultimately, a great deal of responsibility for data gathering, analysis, and dissemination lies with researchers in vocational education. Although researchers are often deeply involved in the concerns behind policy decisions, as Schaefer (1974) comments, vocational education has neglected the area of policy research for a number of reasons. Among these reasons are the facts that vocational educators are not typically researchers, the need for action has always superceded the need for study, and researchers both inside and outside the field are not trusted to understand problems. Vocational education R&D, however, can assist policy makers in becoming better informed and more unified in their approach.

Technically, policy decisions in vocational education or any discipline should be based on sound research. In actual practice, this is often not the case. Coleman (1972) notes that only recently have government agencies applied scientific methods to policy concerns. He states:

> Organizations which appear to be policy-making government agencies (such as the U.S. Office of Education) often have research funds that are intended to be used for policy research, but are in fact allocated to discipline research. A major reason for this appears to be that these agencies often have little control over policy, and thus could not reasonably commission policy research with the expectation of making use of it. (p. 3)

Thus, research has not always been applied to policy-making decisions and has not always been aimed at the policy makers in vocational education. Vocational education R&D has been missing the audience of policy makers in agencies and schools. Venn (1975, p. 11) claims that most research reports are written for researchers, not for school principals and superintendents. He makes four recommendations on narrowing the gap between vocational education researchers and policy makers. These are:

- Vocational education R&D must look at the problem of how to apply R&D results.
- R&D results must be stated in language policy makers and the public can understand.
- Dissemination must be aimed more at policy makers and administrators.
- Money spent on disseminating "evaluated" R&D results must be as great or greater than that spent on R&D (p. 26).

The Committee on Vocational Education Research and Development (COVERD) report (1976) was also critical of the lack of connection between vocational R&D and policy issues. The committee, however, is not critical of the fact vocational education R&D tends to reach only researchers and miss the audience of policy makers. Rather, it focuses on "a lack of coherent policy, administration, and leadership" in the R&D system (p. 2). It is because vocational education R&D is not backed by "stable policy, leadership, and priorities" that COVERD found it lacking in depth (p. 2). Committee recommendations, particularly those concerning the study of long-term problems of national and multi-state significance, suggest the need for greater R&D involvement in issues of broad scope.

Giving greater credence to vocational education R&D will not necessarily provide coherence in a policy-making process which is inherently complex and often without apparent design. Neither do the concepts of the national data system, national research center, or local advisory councils promise to establish a more rational policy-making process. Yet, improved communication between the areas of theory and action in vocational education can only upgrade the processes of issue identification and policy making. As Pierce (1976) comments, vocational educators must assume greater responsibility for identifying critical issues and resolving these issues before they are pointed out by others. Vocational educators and researchers can, at the very least, arrive at a common recognition of the questions behind issues and policy in the field. These are some of the questions we may wish to examine:

- What should policy in vocational education include? In other words, what should be its parameters?
- What might be the appropriate divisions of that policy? In other words, how might it be broken down into areas of concern?
- What is the relationship between vocational education policy and that of education in general?
- What areas related to vocational education need examination in the context of an expanded philosophy or policy?
- What areas of vocational education policy should be explicit?
- How can policy be made more proactive rather than reactive?
- What efforts can be made to increase communication between the various groups involved in the policy-making process in vocational education?

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